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# THE AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL MONTHLY

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## THE MATHEMATICAL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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### A TENTATIVE PLATFORM OF THE ASSOCIATION.

No man can speak with authority concerning the future of this new ASSOCIATION which was created by those who met at Columbus last December. Its future lies with those who constitute its membership. Any statement must be rather a history of past events than a prediction for the future.

What were the causes which led so many to wish for, to exert themselves and to struggle for a new society in the mathematical field? What motives lay behind the movement which culminated in this organization? These are questions which are distinctly answerable. I shall try to show for those who did form the Association what were their purposes and what is now their aim. If these purposes or aims are wrong or insufficient, they will perish and newer and better policies will supplant them. The great fact which we cannot overlook is that we now have a large and representative body of men and women interested in mathematics joined together in this association to foster whatever they believe to be worthy and beneficial.

The chief motive may well be said to be that of service to the whole body of teachers of mathematics in American colleges. If I am right, the Association will not stop at anything which will serve this body of men.

Perhaps there is one exception. The majority of those responsible for the new organization are themselves members of the American Mathematical Society. This older organization is itself bound by its constitution to promote the interests of mathematics in this country. That there should be any conflict between the two organizations would defeat the ends of both, and would not give the maximum service which can be rendered to American mathematicians. The American Mathematical Society has chosen, through the action of its Council,<sup>1</sup> to restrict its activities to the field of pure research in mathematics, and to the promotion of those phases of mathematics which are commonly associated with

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<sup>1</sup>*Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society*, volume 21, page 482 (July, 1915); this MONTHLY, volume 22, page 252 (October, 1915).

that word. Those responsible for the new organization are by no means at variance with this determination, and it is their aim to carry out in good faith the separation of fields of activity provided for by the action just mentioned. This one limitation to the activities of the Association should therefore be mentioned prominently.

Another restriction which is imposed, not by any agreement but by the dictates of good judgment, is that matters dealing with secondary and elementary schools should be left to the organizations already in existence devoted to that field. The new organization will not undertake to discuss or to print papers specially dealing with the details of secondary instruction, though it may well undertake to discuss and define questions concerning the preparation of students who enter colleges, particularly with respect to training in mathematics.

This question of college entrance is one of such vital importance that some leadership of national standing is desirable to crystallize and to formulate the views of mathematicians of all grades of schools. Such questions cannot be said to be the primary function of any one class of organization, and it is thought that secondary school teachers will be the first to welcome a strong national leadership in this matter. It may be well to add that the Council of the American Mathematical Society decided specifically about a year ago not to undertake work along this line, in its relation to the attack upon mathematics in the secondary schools now being made in various quarters.

In general, however, the activities of the Association will be centered strongly in the collegiate field, and it is expected that the great majority of the work fostered by the Association will be on questions directly affecting collegiate courses in mathematics. That the range of topics which may be concerned is rather large, and that the considerations which may be presented are varied and complex is reasonably forecast by the papers which have appeared in the MONTHLY since its reorganization three years ago.

There will doubtless be many articles of historical interest. These will deal with topics which may lie anywhere in the entire range of mathematics. They may be said to be allied with the collegiate courses on the history of mathematics. Thus, the interesting paper by Professor Karpinski presented before the Columbus meeting was entitled "The Story of Algebra." It might be thought that this paper was therefore of secondary character. But the merest inspection of it will suffice to demonstrate that it lies beyond the secondary field and that its association is strictly with the history of mathematics. Other papers, such as Professor Cajori's remarkable series of articles on the History of Logarithms, and the various interesting papers on Number Systems which have appeared in the MONTHLY, are further indication of the intention to deal with matters of this type.

That elementary college courses are still open to serious reconsideration is evidenced by the appearance of several important papers in the MONTHLY during the last two years which deal with subjects taught in the freshman year. Other weighty contributions of this character are in type awaiting their turn.

Perhaps more deserving of mention is the fact that advanced college subjects

should properly fall within the field of this association, and that discussions which affect such topics as projective geometry, second courses in calculus, the elementary theory of functions, and other courses commonly given to undergraduates, are properly subjects for discussion.

One more idea would seem to me to clarify the situation very materially. There have appeared in the MONTHLY from time to time articles which cannot be said to be of research character from the standpoint of the common acceptance of that word, but which nevertheless represent a great deal of labor of a purely investigational sort which would seem quite worthy of being called research in a broader interpretation of that word. This again is well illustrated by the historical papers mentioned above, all of which certainly constitute a very dignified form of research in this broader sense, though they may not satisfy the stricter interpretation placed ordinarily on the word research. The same thing can be said of a number of other papers which have appeared in the MONTHLY which deal essentially with college subjects. It is held that a dignified discussion which involves investigation from a scientific point of view is worthy of the name research in its broader application. While the new association will recognize fully the prior right of the American Mathematical Society in all questions which would ordinarily be termed research under the common interpretation, the attitude of this Association will be to encourage and to dignify all investigations of the character which have here been called research in the broader sense.

If I have tried to say what seems to me to be the policy of those responsible for the organization of the ASSOCIATION, I should perhaps add a word concerning the questions distinctly avoided thus far, which may be said to be not within our present intentions. One such which certainly deserves mention is the general notion of pedagogy in its more restricted interpretation. All of those questions which are termed pedagogical in the strict sense of that word have been held, and are held, by those responsible for the organization of the Association to belong to the field of education and to be wholly outside the field of the present association. Just as research will be held to be within its province only if the word is given a broad interpretation, it may be said also that the discussions which this association will foster may be termed pedagogical only if that word is used in a much broader sense than is common. I may define this broader sense to include those questions affecting instruction in which a *professional knowledge of the subject-matter* is a necessary element toward the formation of any dignified conclusion. That there is no doubt about the existence of such questions is amply proved by the files of the MONTHLY during the last two years.

This statement does not pretend to be exhaustive or infallible. The intention is to give as clear an idea as may be in a short space of characteristic topics which this Association will discuss. That the policy of the Association may be changed in the future and that the statements of this article are by no means binding upon the Association will be quite evident upon even a casual examination of the Constitution.

E. R. HEDRICK, PRESIDENT.

COLUMBIA, MISSOURI, February 25, 1916.